



First JUSTICE WITH
LOVE AND JOY,
OPEN TO AWE
**Unitarian
Universalist**
SOCIETY OF SYRACUSE

Policy #: 001

Policy Name: Conflict Resolution

Purpose: To describe the procedure for how conflict is identified, managed and resolved when occurring among individuals at First Unitarian Universalist Society of Syracuse (First UU).

Original Date: 4/13/2014

Written By: Valoree Suttmore 1/13/2014

Revision Dates: 12/18/16, 1/15/2020

Revisions By: Valoree Suttmore 10/26/2016

Valoree Suttmore 9/2/2019

Reviewed By: Conflict Resolution Committee 9/5/2019
Jennifer Hamlin-Navias 9/9/2019

Approved By: 2019-2020 First UU Board of Trustees 1/15/2020

A. General

As human beings we each have had different experiences, cultural backgrounds, family interactions and societal influences that have shaped who we are. As a result we each have developed our own opinions, values and beliefs and very often these are not the same for each individual.

Even within a group of people who have chosen to come together under a common theme, there will be differences. Within any group of individuals, at some point, there might be conflict. Conflict often times is healthy and paves the way for significant growth and opportunity within a group. Many times conflict can be worked through and resolved between the individuals or groups involved, and this process will lead to greater strength within the group and among the individuals themselves.

Conflicts, disagreements, and differences of opinion are all a normal part of group dynamics and interaction. However, there are times when conflict continues and grows to a point where damage occurs and there is erosion of the relationships between the individuals within the group. When this occurs the entire group is in danger of falling apart.

As conflict grows without resolution, it spreads to individuals within the group who may have been uninvolved in the conflict initially. The conflict can take on a life of its own and begin to destroy relationships. Therefore it is vital that a process exists for, recognizing, managing and resolving conflict that occurs within an organized group.

As a Society that promotes and uses the democratic process, we know the well-being of our community rests upon each member being willing to participate actively in this process and to respect the collective wisdom that results.

In this Society, the conflict resolution process is managed and guided by the Congregational Relations Committee (CRC). The five members of this committee are dedicated to assisting and intervening when conflict cannot be resolved. CRC members are available to address and mediate conflict situations that cannot be resolved otherwise. In addition, the CRC is committed to providing education to the congregation about constructive ways to handle conflict situations and conflict prevention.

This procedure applies to situations involving any individuals within the Society including committee members, members of the Board of Trustees or Program Council, This procedure applies to conflicts involving any individuals within the Society including committee members, members of the Board of Trustees or Program Council, and conflicts between paid staff and non-paid individuals within the congregation. Conflict between paid staff members are handled as outlined in job contracts and covenants between staff members.

Conflict Can Arise for a Number of Reasons:

1. A disagreement between groups or individuals about congregational policies and/or procedures.
2. A concern about staff: either about the effectiveness of a staff member or about the staff member's job description, duties or priorities.
3. Misunderstandings and miscommunications between individuals that don't get resolved in a timely and satisfactory manner.
4. Personal animosity: two people in the congregation simply don't like each other and have responsibilities that make them interact.
5. Unmet expectations: a person expects that the congregation, a committee or a staff member will do certain things and it doesn't happen. (This may include unmet needs that the various bodies of the society are not equipped to meet or that the Society does not consider itself to be the right place to address them.)

The real reasons for a conflict sometimes may not be apparent because the people involved are unable or unwilling to articulate them. Sometimes we think we are upset by one thing when the real culprit is something else.

The Conflict can Arise and Become Apparent in a Number of Ways:

1. One person complains to another, often about a third person (triangulation) and the listener doesn't know how to respond effectively.
2. One person tries the same complaint out on multiple listeners and finds several who provide support and a little issue becomes a larger one.
3. A committee is disgruntled about something it wants to do or wants to have the Society do and takes unilateral action.
4. A proposal by a committee to the Board, or a proposal by the Board, meets significant opposition and significant support.
5. There are arguments within a committee that exceed the bounds of normal discussion.

Initial Measures for Managing Conflict

1. Covenant of Congregational Relationships
2. Clearly defined congregational policies and procedures that are easily accessible to all members and staff.

3. Provide information and education to the congregation about conflict and the process/procedure to follow when it appears unresolvable.
4. Define clearly the process of becoming a Society member and the responsibilities of being a member. This will include an agreement to abide by the Covenant of Congregational Relationships as well as the Conflict Resolution process/procedure.

B. Forms

Conflict Resolution Incident Report-Form # 004

Conflict Mediation Documentation-Form # 005

Conflict Mediation Documentation-Notes/Summary-Form # 006

C. Procedure

1. LEVEL I-Assistance/Advice/Consultation

- a. Any individual can approach the CRC at any time for advice and consultation in resolving conflicts directly. The CRC prefers to function in an advisory role and values the opportunity to assist with the resolution of any conflict that can be handled without formal intervention by the CRC.
- b. At this level, one or more members of the CRC will function as consultants and may offer advice or assistance regarding how to handle a particular situation or how best to speak with or interact with another individual. In some cases the CRC may simply listen to concerns as a way of offering support. This stage does not involve formal CRC Conflict Resolution proceedings.

2. LEVEL II-Formal Conflict Resolution Process

- a. Level II involves formal action on the part of the CRC in resolving the conflict. When a conflict occurs that can't be resolved between individuals, groups or committees within the Society, a member of the CRC is notified. The initial complainant will complete a Conflict Resolution Incident Report (Form # 004) and submit the report to the CRC for review.
- b. The CRC member receiving the report will notify the other CRC members as soon as possible but no longer than 2 calendar days following receipt of the report. Copies of the Conflict Resolution Incident Report (Form # 004) are sent to the other CRC members for review and discussion and the CRC will determine who will mediate the situation. At least 2 members of the CRC must be involved with the mediation.

- c. Once it is determined which committee members will be involved with addressing the conflict and providing mediation, those individuals will contact the person who submitted the Conflict Resolution Incident Report (Form # 004) within 7 calendar days following receipt of the report to gather further information about the situation. The CRC will also contact the other party(s) named in the report in order to thoroughly gather all facts and information surrounding the incident and to request they complete a Conflict Resolution Incident Report (Form # 004) as well. Completed Conflict Resolution Incident Report forms (Form # 004) are requested to be returned by the parties involved within five calendar days.
- d. The two CRC members will determine what meetings need to be arranged, either with each party separately or all parties together. Meetings will be arranged according to mutually agreed upon times by all parties involved as well as the two CRC members facilitating.
- e. The CRC members involved with the mediation will document all contacts and meetings that occur on the Conflict Mediation Documentation form (Form # 005). This documentation will include dates, individuals in attendance, and the outcome. A summary of all contacts and meetings will be documented on the Conflict Mediation Documentation-Notes/Summary form (Form # 006).
- f. The goal of the CRC mediation is to get the parties involved to come to some mutual understanding and common ground that is agreed to by everyone as expeditiously as possible.
- g. However, if the issue can't be resolved during initial meetings, additional meetings may be arranged in an effort to come to some mutually agreed upon resolution. Other CRC members may be asked to evaluate the situation if conflict still remains unresolved.

3. Level 3-COM Decision

- a. If it is apparent that the parties are unable to reach common ground, the CRC members involved with the mediation and facilitation will render a decision. Decisions made by the CRC in conflict situations are final and the parties involved will respect (while possibly not agreeing with) the CRC's final decision. All CRC decisions will be documented on the Conflict Mediation Documentation-Notes/Summary Forms (Form # 006).

4. Special Circumstances

- a. The CRC members will focus on process, behaviors and relationships in the mediations. In instances where conflict resolution may require decisions or actions that have a fiduciary impact on the congregation's operations or staff, the CRC's recommendations will be provided to the Board of Trustees for final resolution.

- b. Any conflict that involves a member of the CRC or which the CRC may otherwise be unable to address objectively will be referred to an alternative mediator. Alternative mediators will be chosen at the discretion of the CRC. All CRC members must be involved with a decision to refer a matter to an alternative mediator. The decision regarding who an alternative mediator will be, is determined by majority vote of the CRC members. If necessary, the CRC may consult with the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees for input on the situation and suggestions for an alternative mediator. In some cases it may be necessary to request assistance from other congregations (e.g. May Memorial) if it is apparent that a situation is unable to be resolved.
- c. The members of the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees and/or the minister may be consulted regarding a conflict situation with extenuating circumstances. However due to potential conflicts of interest, these individuals are prohibited from functioning as alternative mediators in the conflict resolution process outside of what is described in the first paragraph of this section.
- d. If the conflict involves one or more of the members of the Board of Trustees or the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, that person(s) will recuse themselves from any BOT or Executive Committee meetings involving discussions about the conflict and also recuse themselves from any voting related to the conflict.
- e. The goal of this procedure is to resolve conflicts when they occur among individuals or groups at First UU. In order for the process to work effectively all parties need to be active participants in the process. While it is recognized that at times this may be uncomfortable, dealing with conflict in a direct, open, honest, and respectful manner is the only way resolution will be successful. There may be situations and conflicts that simply cannot be resolved, even with outside/alternative mediators. The CRC, BOT and/or Executive Committee of the BOT may in some cases need to make difficult decisions for the good of the entire congregation at First UU. These decisions may involve but are not limited to revocation or denial of membership in First UU.

5. Completed Paperwork

- a. All documentation and other paperwork related to a formal conflict resolution process will be assembled by the two CRC members involved with the mediation and the file will be given to the Office Administrator to be retained in a locked drawer in the First UU office.